

POST-EVENT SUMMARY REPORT

Name of Event: "Remaining Vitally Alive Through All Our Years: A Conversation to Give Input to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging"

Date of Event: May 25, 2005

Location of Event: Columbus Community Center
2531 South 500 East
South Salt Lake City, Utah 84115

Number of Persons Attending: 92 **Sponsor:** Salt Lake County (Utah) Aging Services

Contact Name: Shauna O'Neil

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Priority Issue #1: Aging-in-Place With The Support Of Coordinated Social And Health Services – Addressing the programs and services needed to enable older adults to "age-in-place".

Barriers:

Decreasing funding for subsidized housing programs

Inadequate funds for home modifications to make it easier for seniors to remain in their home.

Some segments of the housing continuum, particularly assisted living, are priced out of reach of low, moderate, and some middle income seniors.

Transportation resources to meet the needs of seniors are inadequate – they don't exist in sufficient quantities, they are often not affordable, and they often have waiting lists for services.

Streets and Highways are not user-friendly – lettering on highway signs is too small, the sequence of traffic flow through intersections is not uniform, lighting is inadequate for "older vision."

The public transit system is not totally accessible – routes need to run more frequently and more on the weekends; there are gaps in the geographic coverage of the system's routes.

More support of all kinds needs to be available for caregivers of the elderly, including financial assistance and incentives along with increased services to help with caregiver's problems.

It is often difficult for the first-time user to find the appropriate social service agency.

Technology could be used more to make services and information about services more readily available to consumers.

Funding for in-home services are inadequate to meet present and future needs for services.

Too often, the first option for dealing with the problems of an older, frailer senior is placement in a nursing home rather than supportive services to enable them to remain in their own home.

Lack of adequate background information makes it risky to select an in-home care provider.

Proposed Solution(s): (list suggested solutions to the challenges described above)

1. Housing Issues – Increase funding for subsidized housing; promote the use of universal design in home renovation/construction; increase funding for modifications to the existing housing; and an affordable continuum of housing options.

2. Transportation Issues – An increase in the types of available transportation; increase parking options for seniors; more traffic infrastructure enhancements (such as bigger print on highway signs and better roadway lighting); and a truly accessible public transit system.

3. Caregiver Support – Including tax credits for family caregivers; increased availability of respite services; increased education and support of caregivers.

4. Information and Education – Foster coordination between existing service agencies; increase the visibility of phone book listings for social service agencies; use technology to make sure more people can access available services.

5. In-Home Services – Support funding for in-home services; shift the mindset away from long term care facilities and to in-home services instead of thinking of a facility first for care – the home should be the first option; broaden eligibility requirements for in-home services; create a local register for in-home care providers; adopt policies that encourage us to take back the responsibility for caregiving and assistance to the older population.

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Priority Issue #2: (Describe specific issue) Healthy Lifestyles: Prevention and Disease Management

Barriers: (List any barriers that may exist related to this issue) Barriers involved in this issue include, but are not limited to:

The cost of prescription drugs has become quite expensive for many seniors.

It is increasingly difficult for seniors to keep track of their medications as the number of prescriptions they are taking increases.

The recently enacted Prescription Benefit Card program and the new Medicare Part D benefit are confusing to many seniors. They need more information about Part D to ease their concerns and increase their acceptance of this new benefit.

Transportation to medical appointments and to pick-up prescriptions remains a critical need for seniors who no longer drive and have no other means of transportation.

For many seniors, increasing age is often accompanied by increasing isolation. More needs to be done to reduce the level of isolation of older adults and keep their families involved in their lives.

Insufficient mental health funding is being directed at the elderly population.

Communities need to be more livable with both greater and easier access to programs and services needed by the older population.

Proposed Solution(s): Recommendations were grouped into three subject areas and included:

Prescription and Medical Delivery —

1. Do more to educate and encourage seniors to ask more questions of their doctors and pharmacists; expand the use of pharmacists to provide medication evaluations and consultations.
2. Encourage seniors to comparison shop for their medications among different pharmacies.
3. Expand the use and distribution of Med-Check booklets – booklets for seniors to use to record their medications and other health issues. Promote these at senior centers and other outlets.
4. Initiate a widespread educational campaign on the new Medicare Part D benefit.
5. Recruit more volunteers to provide transportation to medical appointments and pharmacies.
6. Require more rigorous testing and approval for new medications.
7. Increase funding in order to expand the availability of physical and occupational therapy for those who need it.

Mental Health/Memory —

1. At the individual level, do more to encourage seniors to :
 - a. Look out for their friends and know where to seek early intervention assistance for them if necessary;
 - b. Stay connected with their peers and stay involved in activities in the community.
2. Encourage families to remain involved in their older member's lives.
3. Intensify outreach efforts directed at seniors who are without other family members.

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4. Provide more mental health screening and more accessible mental health counselors for older adults (perhaps at senior centers).
5. Allocate Older Americans Act Title III-D funds to help expand mental health services for seniors.
6. Increase training and encourage seniors to voice their problems to elected officials and service providers.
7. Increase Medicare/Medicaid funding for mental health coverage.
8. Increase funding for research for mental health and memory issues.
9. Enact more compassionate legislation, particularly in regard to mental health issues.
10. Undertake a national initiative aimed at depression among the elderly.

Expenses —

1. Work to educate individual seniors to:
 - a. Demand generic drugs;
 - b. Be a “Proactive Consumer”;
 - c. Investigate and use mail order services for prescriptions where it will result in a cost savings;
 - d. Avoid the use of tobacco and the excessive use of alcohol;
 - e. Learn more about critically evaluating the risks and benefits of alternative medications.
2. Advocate for more livable communities with greater accessibility to vital services.
3. Institute a cap on spending for pharmaceuticals; examine and institute price controls on pharmaceuticals.
4. Increase prevention interventions aimed at seniors.
5. Expand dental coverage available through Medicare.

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Priority Issue #3: Remaining Productive: Employment, Volunteerism, Education and The Arts

Barriers: Barriers involved in this issue include, but are not limited to:

Programs for the aging are underfunded; it's difficult at best to advertise the availability of a service when the best that can be done for someone in need of help is to place them on a waiting list.

Transportation resources available to meet the needs of the senior population are inadequate – they don't exist in sufficient quantities, they are often not affordable, and they frequently have waiting lists for services.

Many people enter their retirement years financially unprepared for their retirement. Financial advice and resources to help people prepare for retirement need to be more widely available.

Volunteer programs and opportunities to volunteer in the community often receive a low priority for publicity, promotion and funding.

As society becomes more diverse, cultural prejudices limit access to services by minority seniors. Seniors lack a good understanding of what they can do to live a healthier lifestyle.

Older adults, particularly women who have never worked outside the home or who have not worked in many years, who find they must enter or re-enter the labor force are often at a disadvantage in terms of having the job skills necessary to be successful in the labor market.

Volunteer opportunities are not viewed as a viable use of one's time by much of the population.

Proposed Solution(s): This session's recommendations included:

1. Increase the availability and accessibility of staff resources aimed at helping people become aware of and have access to available services in the community.
2. Expand transportation efforts to help more seniors reach needed resources in the community.
3. More financial advise needs to be available for seniors, especially on such topics as how to manage their money, and what financial resources are available to assist those with low incomes.
4. Increase the priority for companionship programs, the opportunity for volunteerism and social engagement.
5. Efforts need to be undertaken to increase everyone's sensitivity to the issue of cultural diversity.
6. Strengthen educational resources and programs, esp.those seniors re-/entering the workforce.
7. More training and information for seniors to help them live a healthier lifestyle.
8. More should be done to increase the availability and awareness of volunteer opportunities for seniors. These should also include creating a service corps of retirement specialists, providing more opportunities for life-long learning, and providing opportunities to serve as mentors to others.
9. Expand job training programs and support for older single women re-/entering the labor force.
10. Support the resolution on strategies for changing attitudes towards aging and increasing opportunities for volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement endorsed by the three National Senior Corps Associations (Foster Grandparent, Senior Companion & RSVP.)

All of the recommendations should be considered as policy enhancements and given priority for funding and appropriation.

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Priority Issue #4: Issues Surrounding The End Of Life

Barriers: Barriers involved in this issue include, but are not limited to:

Legal documents of any sort are very confusing to the vast majority of the population.

Most elected officials are not particularly well educated on issues surrounding 'end-of-life' decisions.

The monetary issues surrounding end-of-life situations can often debilitate a family financially.

Many services are available to seniors with very low incomes and seniors who are financially well-off can afford needed services, however, middle income seniors are often left in a situation where then are financially ineligible for many forms of assistance while at the same time are unable to afford to pay for the services outright.

Proposed Solution(s): This session's recommendations included:

1. Work needs to be done to make legal documents (such as Living Wills, Power of Attorney, and Do Not Resuscitate orders) simpler and easier to understand.
2. More needs to be done to educate the public on legal documents (such as Living Wills, Power of Attorney, and Do Not Resuscitate orders). Seminars were suggested as a means for explaining to seniors and caregivers what these documents are and how they work, as well as providing assistance in completing personal documents.
3. Efforts need to be undertaken to educate legislators on end-of-life issues. We should initiate these conversations rather than waiting for legislators to take the lead.
4. More needs to be done to increase access to services and subsidies for caregivers. This could include, for example, tax incentives, stipends, and tax deductions.
5. We must examine the issue of priorities for access to services for seniors who have incomes just above the low-income/poverty level (and are, thus, not eligible for Medicaid or other income-based eligibility programs and services) but who do not have sufficient resources to obtain necessary and appropriate services for themselves. We must also examine the issue of equity of illegal aliens and others who have not "contributed into the system" receiving priority access to services over long-time employees (and citizens) who contributed but will never truly get significant assistance from these programs.

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